STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 58 | Number 2 (Spring 1999) pps. 202-204

# Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire

ISSN 0003-4827

gan's Upper Peninsula, dominated by water, woods, and winter. Lankton has set a marvelous precedent for a compatible social history of the Mesabi and Vermilion ranges. Surely some historian will pick up the challenge to develop the strong social ties between copper country and the iron ranges. In the meantime, readers will enjoy this significant contribution to nineteenth-century mining history.

*Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire,* by Katherine G. Morrissey. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997. ix, 220 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. $45.00 cloth, $18.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY TIMOTHY MAHONEY, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT LINCOLN

The definition of a region is, by any criteria, elusive. Regions are, by their very nature, constructed entities or composites in which different groups from different subregions and localities compete to shape a more general level of identity and meaning. In any attempt to create a coherent regional identity, therefore, one group acquires power over the lives, perceptions, and cognitive worlds of others. In *Mental Territories,* Katherine G. Morrissey does not attempt to offer yet another definition of *region.* Rather, following the dictums of Donald W. Meinig ("regions exist in the minds of men" [140]) and William Robbins ("regionalism is, by definition, . . . a mental construction" [12]), she explores the deeply contested nature of the mental construction of regions. In doing so, she illustrates why regional identities are historically so difficult to define and sustain.

Tracing the story of the mental construction of the region around Spokane, Washington, as the "Inland Empire," an economic, social, and cultural hinterland that presented itself as one of the most important regions of the West, Morrissey imaginatively reconstructs—by employing subtle analytic language—the cognitive perceptions, discourses, and mental constructions of different peoples who lived in or moved to the area—in particular, American settlers and entrepreneurs, the Coeur d'Alene Indians, miners, and railroad men. Although some readers may take Morrissey's reading of region as a postmodern exercise in "decoding" the language of competing "discourse communities," she grounds her analysis of that discourse in the experiences and perceptions of real people living and acting "on the ground" of eastern Washington, northern Idaho, and southern British Columbia.

The rhetoric of Spokane's boosters, who imagined the city as the center of the "Inland Empire," was drawn from an urban-economic formula used throughout the East, Middle West, and West, and they

simply imposed it hegemonically on the area. Entrepreneurs followed the script of this regional urban booster vision and laid down economic arrangements, networks, and systems that established Spokane as the regional center of a broad hinterland. Morrissey skillfully shows that, from the outset, groups with very different spatial perceptions and regional mental constructions of the area challenged this capitalist, regional discourse. In their efforts to establish an integrated urban-economic region, Spokane's mercantile and industrial elite crashed through myriad lines demarcating other people's cognitive regions. From the perspective of the Coeur d'Alenes, for example, Americans' greed for land and economic control of the hinterland transformed the porous and accommodating "fences" of their region into barriers that both excluded and enclosed them. From a different perspective, miners also resisted full integration into Spokane's empire-building version of regionalism. Eventually, even Spokane's boosters recognized that the railroad opened the regional economy to aggregate forces of the national economy that undermined its regional central place functions. As local slow growth drifted toward stagnation, outsiders' views of Spokane and its hinterland as just another trading territory connected to a national system and market muted the confidence of Spokane's boosters.

The public and private discourse in Spokane's "Inland Empire" hinterland was too diverse, too discursive, and not powerful or aggressive enough to counteract these national forces. As regional boundaries, definitions, and dynamics atrophied, the hegemonic power of the regional discourse of the "Inland Empire" eroded. Those who held on to the centralist view of Spokane and its hinterland increasingly lived in a very different region from the one experienced and perceived by outsiders and other regional groups. In time, the diverse views of individuals, groups, and cultures precluded any unified discourse, leaving in its wake a fragmented mental territory that gradually dematerialized into "layers of memory, history, and meaning," which Morrissey calls a "ghost region."

Morrissey suggests that we can learn from this story. Indeed, I think we can. In this skillfully written, subtly argued book—itself a powerful and articulate discourse—Morrissey reminds us not only of the power and possibilities, but also of the weaknesses and burden of "region." This history of one effort to create a unified sense of region gives readers powerful insights into why regions are so hard to pin down and why academic conferences that seek to define the West or Middle West always seem to come to naught. Perhaps the way we construct or define regions is, in itself, flawed. Though Morrissey does

not address that question, her subtle presentation and discussion of regionalism raises it, leaving readers wondering just what a non-hegemonic construction of region—perhaps some kind of a segmented realm or a coalition of diverse views—might look like. In her concern about this issue, Morrissey deals with one of the central concerns of western and other regional historians. Though dealing with the Far West, this study compels one to think more deeply about region and to ask questions that may reinvigorate the discourse on regions in general. If residents and scholars of the Middle West will take Morrissey's analysis and conclusions to heart, we may be able to reinvent our concept of region and better understand its role in our lives.

*Buckeye Schoolmaster: A Chronicle of Midwestern Rural Life, 1853–1865*, edited by J. Merton England. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996. xi, 308 pp. Illustrations, map, index. $49.95 cloth, $24.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY TERRY A. BARNHART, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

John M. Roberts (1833–1914), a denizen of Madison County, Ohio, was an inveterate observer of the local and national scene. A schoolmaster, miller, itinerant bookseller, and farmer, he was a keen student of human nature and the events of his day. The "thick description" of daily life present in Roberts's writings will be much valued by social and cultural historians. Social customs, school life, and politics were of interest to him, and those seeking to make comparative studies of common schools and life in midwestern rural communities during the mid–nineteenth century will be rewarded by familiarizing themselves with the life, times, and thought of John M. Roberts. This chronicle ranks alongside Edward Eggleston's *Hoosier Schoolmaster* as a source of information and local color on the history of rural education in the Midwest, while Roberts's comments on social groups and politics give new testimony to how deeply seated were the social prejudices and sectional jealousies of his generation.

Roberts's orbit was in and around the communities of Summerford and London in central Ohio, but his social views on aristocrats, abolitionists, and African Americans and his political commentary on the Civil War will be of interest to historians of those subjects beyond their local context. Indeed, Roberts's commentary is notable for the breadth of its topical coverage. The American Protective Association, John Wilkes Booth, conscription during the Civil War, John C. Breckinridge, and the activities of Ohio Copperheads are but a partial sam-